

NMSS Research Grant - Frequently Asked Questions

The UAE National MS Society (NMSS) is dedicated to achieving breakthroughs in the cure for multiple sclerosis (MS). To be considered for funding, all projects must demonstrate alignment with the NMSS's research theme and priorities. The NMSS grant will support research for an initial one-year period, with the possibility of extension for up to three years. This FAQ document has been created to help applicants understand the process, make informed decisions regarding their eligibility, and streamline answers for our external communication.

ABOUT THE GRANT THEME

1. What is the theme of this grant cycle?

The 2026 Grant Cycle is designed to directly operationalize NMSS research priorities while strengthening research in immune-mediated conditions.

Under the theme, **“Advancing MS Innovation through Autoimmune Discovery,”** this cycle advances high-impact, MS-centered science while recognizing that biological and therapeutic insights generated in multiple sclerosis may inform broader autoimmune discovery through shared immune and neuroinflammatory pathways. NMSS therefore will consider proposals demonstrating potential for MS research to generate relevant knowledge for broader neuroimmune diseases.

Cross-disease relevance should be based on shared biological pathways and clear translational relevance rather than associative comparisons.

Illustrative examples may include studies examining immune activation pathways, biomarker profiles, or cell mediated responses in MS and assessing whether similar mechanisms may be relevant to related neuroimmune conditions such as neuromyelitis optica spectrum disorder (NMOSD) or myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein antibody-associated disease (MOGAD).

All funded studies must remain firmly grounded in MS populations, outcomes, and disease-specific scientific questions.

2. What topics are covered under this theme?

The 2026 grant cycle call will support rigorous, hypothesis-driven research in MS, including:

- Immunobiology and disease mechanisms, including adaptive and B-cell-mediated immune responses, glial-driven neuroinflammation, compartmentalized CNS immune activity, neuroaxonal degeneration, and pathways of remyelination.
- Genetic and epigenetic risk factors
- Environmental risk factors (including EBV) and region-specific exposures.
- Therapeutic innovation and biomarker-guided precision medicine including immune-targeted therapeutic strategies

- NMSS will prioritize interventional clinical studies. Proposals exploring innovative trial designs, such as decentralized models, and strategies to enhance inclusion of underrepresented populations are particularly encouraged.

Across all research domains, investigators are encouraged to consider sex- and gender-based biological differences, including sex-disaggregated analyses where relevant.

3. What are the NMSS research priorities?

01 - Advancing innovative and emerging treatments that can slow, stop, or reverse MS.

02 - Understanding the clinical characteristics, epidemiology, incidence, and prevalence of MS in the UAE.

03 - Understanding the role of genetics in MS in the UAE and globally.

04 - Exploring suspected risk factors of MS in the UAE population.

05 - Understanding the efficacy and effect of specific treatments on populations in the UAE, including new treatments in clinical trials, RIS/CIS treatments, pregnancy, and DMTs.

06 - Exploring the state of access to treatment in the UAE, MENA region, and globally.

ELEGIBILITY

1. Who is eligible to apply?

The principal investigator (PI) applying for the grant must be from an academic institution or clinical institution in the UAE registered to conduct research. The principal investigator can partner with international research institutions. Please review our eligibility criteria on our website.

2. May independent researchers apply?

Independent researchers must hold an affiliation with a UAE-based academic or research institution at the time of application to be eligible.

3. Can PhD students or postdoctoral researchers apply as principal investigators?

No. The principal investigator must hold a faculty, clinical, or research appointment at an eligible UAE-based institution. PhD students and postdoctoral researchers may participate as co-investigators or research team members under a qualified principal investigator.

4. Is collaboration with international institutions permitted?

Yes. Collaborative proposals involving international research institutions are encouraged, provided the principal investigator is based in the UAE and the proposed work maintains a strong connection to the local research ecosystem.

5. Are private institutions or hospitals eligible to apply?

Yes, provided they are registered in the UAE and authorized to conduct research. The principal investigator must have a formal research or clinical appointment at the applying institution.

6. Are previous applicants and grantees eligible?

Yes. Individuals who submitted applications or received funding in previous cycles are eligible to apply during the current cycle, subject to all other eligibility requirements. However, priority will be for applicants who were not awarded funding in the preceding funding cycle.

IRB AND ETHICS REQUIREMENTS

1. Do I need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval?

Yes, any research conducted will need to obtain IRB approval from the relevant IRB office of the institute. Any project that involves institutions in Abu Dhabi must be independently submitted by the PI to the Department of Health (DOH) to get an IRB approval as part of the application process. Institutions outside of Abu Dhabi are required to submit the IRB application to their local/central and provide the IRB approval letter once received. All collaborating institutions where patient recruitment and/or data collection will take place need to submit a relevant IRB approval letter prior to release of funds.

2. Is IRB approval necessary at the Letter of Intent stage?

No. IRB approval is not required when submitting a Letter of Intent.

3. What if the research spans institutions in different Emirates with separate IRBs?

For these proposals, researchers must obtain IRB approval separately from each relevant institution. Projects involving Abu Dhabi-based institutions must obtain IRB approval from the DOH. Institutions outside of Abu Dhabi are required to submit the IRB application to their local/central IRB and provide the IRB approval letter once received.

FUNDING AND DURATION

1. What is the range of available funding?

Grant awards will range from **AED 500,000** to **AED 2,000,000** over the course of the project, based on budget justification and merit. The annual funding ceiling is capped at **AED 700,000** per project.

2. What is the permissible duration for each project?

Each research project must be a minimum of one year and may extend to a maximum of three years. Continued funding for multi-year projects is contingent upon satisfactory review and approval of annual progress and financial reports.

3. How will funds be disbursed?

Funding will be disbursed in instalments, contingent upon timely submission and approval of financial and progress reports by NMSS.

4. What portion of the grant must be utilized within the UAE?

A minimum of 50% of the total project budget must be expended within the UAE.

5. What expenses are considered eligible for funding?

Allowable costs may include personnel, equipment, research supplies, data collection, and dissemination. Indirect costs may be included up to a defined cap, subject to NMSS guidelines.

6. Do I need a detailed overview of the budget at the Letter of Intent stage?

No. During the Letter of Intent stage, a high-level budget overview is sufficient. If your application is successful and proceeds to the full application stage, providing a detailed budget in our grant management system is necessary.

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Is there a preferred study design?

No specific study design is mandated. Applicants are encouraged to select the most appropriate and scientifically sound methodology to address the proposed research question, provided it aligns with the grant theme and NMSS priorities. However, interventional clinical studies will be prioritized for the 2026 grant cycle.

2. What are the important dates for this grant cycle?

Applicants are advised to consult the NMSS website for detailed information on submission deadlines, notification periods, and other key dates relevant to the grant cycle.

3. When will applicants receive feedback on the Letter of Intent?

Letters of Intent will be reviewed by the NMSS research team. Applicants whose LOIs are positively assessed will be invited to submit a full proposal.

4. What criteria will be used to evaluate proposals?

All proposals will undergo review by our research team and Scientific Taskforce, and will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Relevance to the grant theme and NMSS research priorities
- Scientific rigor and innovation
- Feasibility and methodological clarity
- Expertise and qualifications of the research team
- Anticipated impact on MS care or research in the UAE

5. What is NMSS's expectation regarding community engagement in research proposals?

NMSS encourages applicants to include a clear and meaningful community engagement plan as part of their research proposals. This helps strengthen relevance, transparency, and impact, align research with patient needs and lived experience, and improve translation into real-world MS care and outcomes.

Community engagement may vary depending on the study. Examples may include involving people living with MS in study design or advisory input, patient engagement or co-creation workshops, communication and dissemination activities, awareness or research events, or other approaches that meaningfully connect the research with the MS community.

Applicants are encouraged to tailor their approach to what is appropriate and feasible for their study design.

6. What if an application is not successful?

Applicants who are not selected for funding will be notified and may request feedback. Resubmissions are welcome in subsequent cycles, provided all eligibility criteria continue to be met.

7. Are resources available to support applicants during the application process?

Yes. For general grant enquiries, applicants may contact the research team through the grant automation system. For matters related to the full proposal or IRB processes, please contact medical.research@doh.gov.ae.

8. How much prior to the full application deadline is it recommended to apply?

We encourage applicants to apply well ahead of the deadline to allow ample time for any feedback and missing documentation. Please note that Optimy, the grant management system, will automatically close upon the full application deadline, and no further changes will be feasible beyond that time.

REPORTING & ACCOUNTABILITY

1. What are the reporting obligations for funded projects?

Awardees are required to submit progress reports bi-annually. These reports are critical to the continuation of funding and are subject to NMSS review and approval. The NMSS may request additional interim reports as needed.

2. What should be done in the event of project delays?

In the case of significant delays or deviations from the proposed timeline, the Principal Investigator must notify NMSS immediately. Any agreed adjustments should be reflected in progress reports and approved by NMSS.

3. Will dissemination of research outcomes be required?

Yes. NMSS encourages dissemination of research outcomes through peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and accessible summaries tailored to the MS community and broader public. Please note that any publication will require NMSS to be acknowledged as the funding body.

4. What happens if a PI leaves the institution during the project period?

The host institution must notify NMSS immediately of any changes to the PI. A formal written request to transfer the grant to a new PI, deemed appropriate by both NMSS and the host institution.